Request for Proposals for Applied Research Projects to Support Working Waterfronts

The National Working Waterfront Network (NWWN) is pleased to release this call for research project ideas related to working waterfronts. The goal is to partner a graduate student with an entity looking to address a real-world research need. NWWN will help find and supervise the student, along with you who would guide the research. NWWN will provide funding for the student's effort. If you have a research project that you would like considered, please read below for more information.

I. Background

The National Working Waterfront Network is a national collective of individuals, businesses, non-profit organizations, higher academia, Sea Grant programs, local governments, communities, and state and federal agencies. Together, these entities work to strengthen and protect working waterfronts across the United States. The NWWN focuses on various aspects of working waterfronts, including but not limited to:

- Impacts of climate change on working waterfronts
- Workforce development for the marine economy
- Decarbonization of the working waterfront
- Disaster response
- Maritime culture and heritage
- Displacement of water-dependent uses

In partnership with the Urban Harbors Institute (UHI)–an applied research institute at the University of Massachusetts Boston–and with foundation funding, the NWWN and UHI created an internship program that ran from 2021 to 2024. The program focused on applied research to advance the resilience of commercial fishing communities. Participating students received hands-on research experience; internship partners received assistance from a graduate student, paid for by NWWN; and NWWN members learned about research potentially relevant to their own activities. Since the program's inception, there have been ten internships. To learn about past internships and research findings, please visit our website: https://nationalworkingwaterfronts.com/about/internships/.

Building on the success of the last few years, the NWWN is proud to announce another round of the internship program in 2027, funded by the NWWN, with an expanded focus on ANY research related to working waterfronts in the United States. This internship program will be managed through the NWWN and will provide ONE internship during the winter/spring of 2027. The intern will be eligible to earn up to $3,000 for their work.

II. Research Opportunity

Working waterfronts are not only an integral component of the national economy and well-being, but are also inclusive of local coastal communities and their cultural heritage (Ebbin & Trumbull, 2021). The

unique appearances and water-dependent activities of working waterfronts from the East Coast to the West Coast to the Gulf Coast and along rivers and the Great Lakes is evidence of their collective diversity. However, these waterfronts share common struggles in the face of aging infrastructure, shifting regulations, competing uses, environmental protections, and climate change (Island Institute et al., 2013). These waterfronts also have opportunities such as federal funding for waterfront improvements, planning initiatives for enhanced infrastructure, and increased interest in locally sourced and sustainable food.

The NWWN is seeking research project proposals that address challenges and opportunities associated with working waterfronts. Example topics include economic development; climate change planning; workforce development; issues related to equity, diversity, inclusion, and allyship; disaster response; and other topics impacting the viability of working waterfronts and their coastal communities.

III. Eligible Projects

Successful research project proposals will be those that:

1. Address real-world needs and opportunities related to U.S. working waterfronts and their coastal communities
2. Are conducted by a graduate student working part-time during the spring semester of 2027. (Note that this is a request for project ideas. A separate call will be issued in December to recruit interested students.) The timeline for this research is flexible, but must occur between the months of February and June 2027.

IV. Eligible Applicants

The opportunity to submit a proposal is open to any for-profit, non-profit, academic, association/coalition, NGO or government organization with offices in the United States. NWWN membership is not a requirement for eligibility.

The NWWN and UHI are dedicated to practicing commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and allyship (DEIA) in the cultivation of partnerships. We encourage and invite research proposals that are focused on addressing DEIA and removing barriers for interns to become part of the next generation of coastal leaders. We are committed to allowing all interns to be comfortable in their identities and participate fully in their research.

V. Requirements of Participants

The applicant must be willing to:

- Participate in virtual meetings with the NWWN internship coordinator
- Provide information, supervision, and mentorship to the graduate student
- Allow the results of the research project to be shared by the intern in a NWWN webinar presentation (intern attendence mandatory)
- Allow their results to be shared through the NWWN website and listserv

VI. Evaluation Process and Criteria

Submitted proposals will be reviewed by a panel of members from the NWWN. Their review will consider:

- The project's methodology and timeline to ensure they are consistent with the NWWN proposal requirements

- The applicability of the research to working waterfronts in the United States, and its ability to address a challenge and/or opportunity
- The proposer's agreement to participate fully, provide supervision to the intern, and allow results to be shared publicly with the NWWN and in associated communications

Once projects have been reviewed, a small number of selected applicants will be invited to discuss their proposals with the NWWN evaluation team. Once a final project has been selected, the NWWN will issue a call for applications from interested graduate students to serve as interns. NWWN will work with the proposers of the research projects to select the final interns from the pool of candidates.

VII. Contact information for questions

Interested parties may contact Shannon Hogan (internship coordinator), at Shannon.Hogan@umb.edu with any questions or concerns regarding the internship program.

VIII. Proposal requirements

Applicants must submit a single-spaced, two-page research project proposal (in size 11 font or larger) by **Monday, November 13th, 2026** to Shannon.Hogan@umb.edu with the subject line "NWWN Applied Research Proposal".

The proposal must include:

1. The contact information (names, titles, affiliations, email addresses, phone numbers, and mailing addresses) for the lead partner(s) submitting the proposal
2. An explanation of the significance of the proposed research question, specifically addressing how this research question will promote working waterfronts
3. A description of the research methodology and timeline
4. A description of how you will support the intern
5. A description of the final deliverable(s)
6. Resumes, not exceeding two-pages, of the lead partner(s) (not counted toward the two-page page limit of the proposal).

References:

Colburn, L. L., Jepson, M., Weng, C., Seara, T., Weiss, J., & Hare, J. A. (2016). Indicators of climate change and social vulnerability in fishing dependent communities along the Eastern and Gulf Coasts of the United States. *Marine Policy*, *74*, 323–333. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2016.04.030

Ebbin, S. A., & Trumbull, N. (2021). Contested Spaces in the New Blue Economy: Competing for Connecticut's Thames River Working Waterfront. *Geographical Journal*, (August), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1111/geoj.12409

Island Institute, Maine Sea Grant, National Sea Grant Law Center, Coastal Enterprises, I., Florida Sea Grant, Virginia Sea Grant, & Urban Harbors Institute at University of Massachusetts Boston. (2013). *Sustainable Working Waterfronts Toolkit. Final Report*. 36pp. Retrieved from http://workingwaterfronts.ning.com/page/toolkit

National Marine Fisheries. (2019). Fisheries Economics of the United States 2019 Economics and Sociocultural Status and Trends Series. NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-F/SPO-229A. (March) 248. chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://media.fisheries.noaa.gov/2022-07/FEUS-2019-final-v3_0.pdf

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